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ABSTRACT

As part of a larger project, this study was conducted to provide a snapshot of the characteristics, size, work patterns, and training needs of the sessional teaching work force in technical and further education (TAFE) in the vocational education and training (VET) sector in Victoria, Australia. Twelve research questions formed the basis of two printed surveys that were distributed to 5,000 sessional (part-time) teachers and 613 managers in November 2000. The response rate was 19 percent for teachers and 36 percent for managers. Among the findings of the survey were the following: (1) about 10 percent more females than males were employed in the TAFE sessional work force, and about 67 percent of both genders were aged 40 and older; (2) the majority of sessional teachers work for one organization only; (3) the majority of sessional teachers at both public and private providers held teaching or training qualifications; (4) the majority of sessional teachers considered that work to be their career and thought they would be still working in that capacity in the next 5 years; (5) 38 percent of public and 21 percent of private sessional teachers were dissatisfied with the quantity of training provided by their employers; and (6) teachers indicated they are mainly interested in training in computers, information relevant to the areas they were teaching, and teaching and education skills. The study concluded that further research is needed into the type of work force that sessional teachers make up and how their needs should be met. (Contains 14 references.) (KC)

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ED 456 322

# Training the TAFE sessional workforce: a new dynamic in professional development

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This paper provides a report on one of four research projects that are in progress for the Office of Post Compulsory Education, Training and Employment (PETE). These projects, together with other work, are intended to inform and contribute to the understanding and debate on training issues within the publicly-funded technical and further education (TAFE) vocational education and training (VET) sector in Victoria. These projects have followed an investigation, since published by PETE, of trends in the TAFE Institute workforce by the Centre for the Economics of Education and Training (CEET) at Monash University (CEET 2000).

This paper represents the work-in-progress of the research team and does not reflect the opinions or position of the client, PETE, on any of the matters raised.

The research team is interested in receiving commentary and opinion from persons interested in the issues raised in this paper. Many of the issues have relevance when considering the future training of the national VET workforce. Commentary is also sought from stakeholders in other states and territories about the matters raised by this research.

The focus of this project is the Victorian TAFE (VET) sessional workforce in the TAFE Institutes and private providers. This has required us to examine the staffing profile of sessional staff[1], together with their training arrangements and needs in the TAFE sector in some detail.

It is important to note that the sessional workforce in the Adult and Community Education (ACE) sector is being researched by a separate ACE-based project. The findings from this study will be shared with the ACE-based project and will then contribute to an important Victorian research forum on the Future TAFE Workforce which is scheduled for August 2001.

## Context

The intention of this report is to provide a snapshot of data gathered on the characteristics and size of the sessional teaching workforce including data on age, gender, qualifications and employment pattern and background. It makes some observations regarding the future provision of staff development to sessional teachers.

There is a much broader context of change and development that needs to be considered when examining many aspects of the sessional workforce in TAFE (VET). This broader context requires some elaboration.

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For example, in modern western societies the nature and pattern of work - and therefore, of workforce participation - are changing fundamentally. This has been subject to a great deal of commentary and analysis in the international research literature in the last several years.

Even within Australia, long regarded as a model for stable and equitable employment arrangements, it is now clearly the case that for many workers the traditional eight-hour day of 'nine to five' is no longer a standard.

The growth of non-standard hours has been the universal trend towards a non-standard workforce. This has been the product of an accelerating trend to the casualisation of work and corporate outsourcing and downsizing. The latter have been responses to a web of economic, social and political drivers that are broadly connected to Australia's relationships with global systems, technologies and ways of thinking about public and private sector organisation and management.

The emerging national workforce profile is therefore now one of a much more segmented workforce with different employment conditions and experiences, because plurality and diversity has replaced the standard employment model of the past.

VandenHeuvel and Wooden (1999) have pointed out that since 1971 the number of Australian workers in full-time employment has fallen from 75% to around 51%. Over the same period, the number of part-time employees has doubled and the number of casual employees has tripled (Robinson 2000).

Today, casual employees make up 26% of the national workforce and 64.6% of part-time employees are classified as casual (Toomey 2000). Moreover, 'the reality is that more and more workers are stuck in casual employment for longer and longer periods, some for 10 years or more' (Campbell, in Toomey 2000).

The education sector has also experienced this trend. The Department of Education and Training in NSW, for example, employs approximately 13,000 TAFE casual/hourly-paid teachers compared with its permanent TAFE staff of around 5,000 teachers. Hewett (2000) has estimated that over half the South Australian TAFE workforce are classified as casual employees

.

In Victoria, a study by the Australian Council for Private Education and Training estimated that 70% of teachers in commercial private providers were part-time or sessional employees (ACPET 1998).

More recently, Shah (2000) has found that sessional teachers, as a proportion of the workforce in public providers, has increased from 21% in 1993 to 32% in 1998, and that the average annual growth rate was 13.9% (refer to Table 1).

**Table 1:** Annual employment by sex, sessional teachers (persons), 1993-98 (Shah, 2000)

| Year | Male | Female | All |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1993 | 1,020 | 1,096 | 2,116 |
| 1994 | 912 | 1,025 | 1,937 |
| 1995 | 1,050 | 1,247 | 2,297 |
| 1996 | 1,099 | 1,309 | 2,408 |
| 1997 | 1,340 | 1,567 | 2,907 |
| 1998 | 1,465 | 1,609 | 3,074 |
| Average annual rate of growth 1993-98 | 13.0% | 14.8% | 13.9% |

**Note**: Annual employment is calculated by taking the average of monthly employment over the 12 months of the year. Annual growth rates are based on ordinary least squares (OLS) estimates from a log-linear model.

In 2000, CEET released a report on training implications for the TAFE (VET) sector in the future. This research built on the work of Villiers et al (1997a-d), and Seddon and Malley (1998) into staff development provision. In addition to identifying key issues about workforce development, recruitment and the maintenance of quality learning and outcomes, CEET (2000) highlighted the trend to sessional and contract staff among public providers.

CEET (2000) also identified a fall in full-time employment by 8% and an increase in part-time employment by 34% between 1993-1998. More specifically, the number of full-time tenured staff fell from 46% to 37%; fixed term tenured staff remained constant at 28%; and casual staff increased from 26% to 36% of the TAFE workforce. Furthermore, sessional staff, who were the main source of new teachers, were concentrated in health and community services, social and employment skills, science, and visual and performing arts teaching areas.

It is of particular interest that, against a backdrop of government exhortation to Australian industry to commit to training and human resource investment, the growing trend of casualisation appears to impact significantly on workers' access to training.

VandenHeuvel and Wooden (1999) found that permanent employees are more likely to participate in training. However, when the distinction between external training undertaken with or without employer support is made, casual employees are more likely of the two to participate in external training without the support of their employer.

Interestingly, these general workplace trends were reflected in the Victorian TAFE Institute research findings of Villiers et al (1997a-d) and the national review by Harris et al (2000), who both suggested that sessional teachers are less likely to participate in formal in-house training activities. Both researchers also reported that employers with a greater proportion of part-time or casual workers invested less in

training activities than other employers with a larger number of contract or permanent staff.

Villiers also reported that sessional teachers - who in 1996 represented 20% of the combined workforce from a sample of 16 of Victoria's then 27 TAFE institutes - only received 3% of total staff development funding (Villiers et al 1997b, p 28). Villiers also found that the teaching category had a smaller proportion of ongoing staff and a higher proportion of casual employment than any other category of TAFE Institute staff (Villiers et al 1997a, p 14). This led to concerns that TAFE's own training effort was not keeping pace with the growth of teacher numbers.

While the above research can do little more than illustrate the depth and recency of interest in training and training behaviour within the TAFE (VET) industry, it is clear that this is now a major area of opportunity for researchers. As TAFE (VET) has been regarded as a major instrument for supporting industrial training reform, it is of particular interest to glean a much better understanding of the VET industry's own practices and to understand the nature of training and workforce development issues within TAFE (VET).

## Project specification

PETE commissioned the research project to determine the number and characteristics of sessional teaching staff, to identify features of their work patterns and perceptions of their training needs and provide signposts for policy directions in training provision.

More specifically, PETE requested that the methodology should be designed to provide reliable data in relation to the following research questions.

**Composition and characteristics of the TAFE sessional workforce**

- What are the estimated numbers and characteristics of casual staff who comprise this workforce group?
- What is the composition by gender, age and teaching areas of individuals within this group?
- What are the relevant employment backgrounds of such staff?
- How many hold teaching positions in another TAFE provider and is that provider in the public or private sector?
- How many hold training or non-training employment in other public or private sector organisations and how does that employment relate to their teaching expertise?
- Why do individuals in this workforce group seek casual work in TAFE? Do they see their involvement in such work as continuing?

**Training activity and training needs of the TAFE sessional workforce**

- How many receive training from their TAFE employer? Do they regard this as adequate? If not, why not?
- What specific training needs do these staff report as being met or not met by the TAFE employer?
- What are the preferred modes and areas of training required by this workforce group?
- What, if anything, needs to be done to address the training needs of this workforce group? By whom? How? And what are the options?
- What role can online staff training be expected to play in supporting this workforce group?
- How well recognised and understood is the contribution of this workforce group to current and future TAFE operations?

## Methodology

The research for this project used both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The twelve research questions formed the basis of two print-based survey instruments; one for managers of sessional staff and one for sessional teaching staff. Initial focus groups were conducted to inform the design of the survey instrument.

Staff in both private and public TAFE providers were surveyed. They were representative of a variety of industry sectors and geographical locations. Surveys were unmarked and developed according to the code of ethics established by the Market Research Society of Australia.

The survey groups for managers and sessional teachers were drawn from:

- Victoria's 18 TAFE Institutes and 5 TAFE Divisions of Victorian Universities
- a sample of 10% of private providers stratified by region and program profile.

Five thousand surveys were distributed in November 2000 to sessional teachers and 613 to managers (refer to Table 2). A response rate of 18.8% for sessional teachers and 36.1% for managers was achieved.

**Table 2:** Distribution statistics for the survey instrument

| Sector | Sessional teachers | Managers |
|---|---|---|
| Public | 4,512 | 404 |
| Private | 488 | 209 |
| Total | 5,000 | 613 |

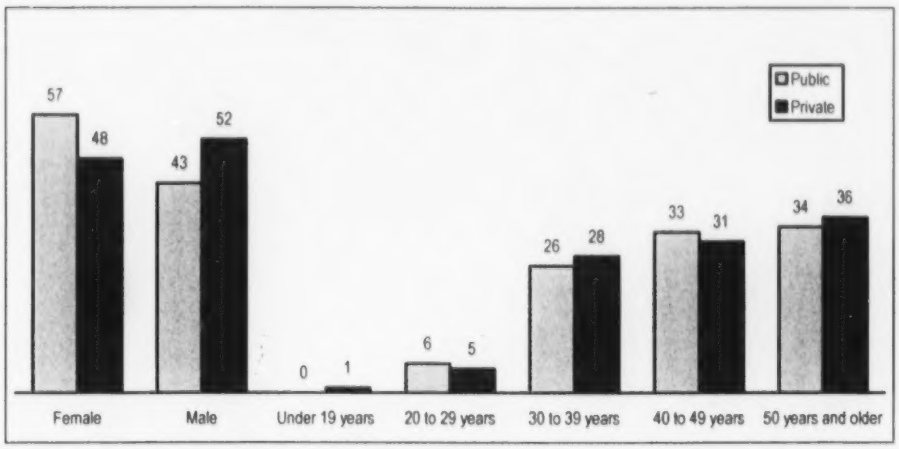
After the survey results were analysed, a further round of focus groups were conducted aimed at capturing rich qualitative data to confirm, expand on and clarify the responses of participants in the survey.

## A preliminary snapshot of findings

### Composition and characteristics of the TAFE sessional workforce

The gender and age analysis generated from the survey data is presented in Figure 1. It was found that there is a slight difference in the proportion of males and females between the public and private sectors. The age of sessional teachers is skewed towards a middle-aged workforce, as 67% of those working at both public and private providers belonged to the 40+ age group classification.

**Figure 1:** Gender and age analysis of TAFE sessional teachers (numbers are proportion of provider type*).




Note: *Figures are rounded to the nearest whole percent.

One of the objectives of the study was to estimate the actual size of the sessional workforce in Victoria. A number of factors were required to be taken into consideration in the calculations, the foremost being the issue of double-counting (where sessional staff may have more than one employer) intrinsic in the collection of statistical returns from TAFE providers.

The results of the survey returns were used to estimate the size of the sessional workforce as presented in Table 3, following. If we assume an annual increase in the size of the workforce as calculated by Shah (2000) of 13.9%, this research verifies the size of the TAFE sessional workforce as measured in previous studies. Villiers et al (1997b, Appendix Table 1) estimated the casual teaching workforce in the public TAFE sector to be some 3,108 persons.

**Table 3**: Estimated composition of the TAFE sessional workforce

| Provider type | Lower estimate | Upper estimate | Mean |
|---|---|---|---|
| Public provider | 4,359 | 4,735 | 4,603 |
| Private provider* | 1,015 | 2,502 | 1,821 |
| TOTAL | 5,374 | 7,237 | 6,424 |

Note: * these figures are currently being verified using a non-response sample from the original survey methodology.

The survey results found that the majority of sessional teachers work for one organisation only (64% of public and 71% of private provider sessional teachers).

It was also found that the majority of the sessional workforce at both public and private providers held teaching or training qualifications (82% of public and 92% of private). Of those, 40% of public and 29% of private provider sessional teachers held a degree or higher degree related to education.

The findings concerning the perception of sessional teachers as to whether they regarded teaching in TAFE as their career could be viewed in two ways. The majority of sessional teachers surveyed did not consider teaching in TAFE to be their main career. However, 44% of public and 31% of private provider sessional teachers felt that teaching in TAFE was their main career. Moreover, when sessional teachers were asked to indicate what their career plans were for the next five years, 67% of public and 51% of private provider sessional teachers felt that they would still be teaching in TAFE. In addition, 56% of public and 64% of private provider sessional teachers felt that it was either 'Somewhat likely' or 'Very likely' that they would be still working as a sessional teacher in the next five years.

**Training activity and training needs of the TAFE sessional workforce**

For the purposes of the project, the definition of training began with that used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in 'Australian social trends 1995, education and work: employee training':

> Training refers to activities which develop or maintain skills related to job performance and/or competency.

Pre-survey focus groups were used to refine the definition in the light of perceptions of training amongst sessional teachers. The results were used to generate the categories of training used in the survey instrument.

When the managers of TAFE providers were asked to estimate the proportion of the sessional teachers working for their organisation that received training, 30% of public and 22% of private provider managers estimated that more than 50% of sessional teachers were receiving training.

It was found that 70% of public and 65% of private provider sessional teachers indicated that they had not received any training.

Research indicated that 38% and 21% of public and private sessional teachers respectively were 'Very dissatisfied' or 'Dissatisfied' with the quantity of training provided by their employers. Conversely, 16% and 24% of public and private sessional teachers respectively were 'Very satisfied' or 'Satisfied' with the amount of training provided.

With regard to the quality of training provided by employers, it was found that 28% and 15% of public and private sessional teachers respectively were either 'Very dissatisfied' or 'Dissatisfied' with the quality of the training, whereas, 22% and 24% of public and private sessional teachers respectively were either 'Very satisfied' or 'Satisfied' with the quality of the training received.

Sessional teachers indicated that they are mainly interested in the following types of training:

- Computers and software applications
- Information relevant to the areas being taught
- Teaching and education skills.

However, public and private sessional teachers ranked them in different orders.

The mode of training delivery was also addressed in the managers' survey. The most popular options as indicated by the managers of sessional teachers (% of respondents who ranked the mode of training as 'Somewhat effective' or 'Highly effective' is indicated in brackets) are:

- Face-to-face (87%)
- Distance education (71%)
- Self-directed online training (70%).

## Summary

The final project report will go some way to providing a more complete account of the characteristics of the current sessional teaching workforce and establish a basis for considering arrangements for their professional development needs.

Continuing data analysis and subsequent validation focus groups by the research team are required before the finalisation of the report. The challenge for the final research report is to explore approaches that represent an innovative and flexible framework that meets the needs of all stakeholders.

However, it is clear from the preliminary findings that orthodox perceptions of the sessional workforce in terms of gender composition, age structure and employment aspirations need to be rethought. In relation to the respondents intentions to remain in sessional employment, the view of the workforce as an ephemeral, peripatetic group has not been born out by this research. In fact, a key feature of the workforce may be that it is more of a stable and significant contributor to the overall effort in training delivery than it has been in the past.

Additional issues that will need to be addressed in the final report include:

- The impact of differences in the characteristics and patterns of participation in the sessional teaching workforce population on training provision.
- The age structure of the sessional teaching workforce.
- The qualifications profiles of the sessional teaching workforce.
- The differing perceptions of training needs and preferred training modes among sessional teaching staff and other stakeholders.
- Differing perceptions among sessional teachers and manager groups as to the comparative effectiveness of different types of delivery.
- Training resources directed at the continuous improvement of subject skills or towards information technology.
- The future employment plans and aspirations of public and private provider sessional teachers.

## Note

1. For the purposes of this research project, sessional teaching staff have been defined as hourly paid trainers/teachers who do not receive holiday or superannuation payments.

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